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Global Governance and European Identity

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Summary

The peaceful and democratic integration of the European countries, including the Eastern enlargement of the Union, cannot be completed if the EU does not become a true, though not federal, polity. Making the European institutions fully legitimate and accountable requires the development of political identity in a shape which is different from both national and cultural identity, but is not opposite to them, and can accommodate diversity and change.

Its contents can be seen in a specific set of constitutional values and principles, including a model of social relations, an international standing and a peculiar and unprecedented system of governance. Identity-formation in the EU goes through several channels, but has still to generate a European public sphere, though the source of this difficulty does not lie in the lack of a European people or *demos*.

Key words: Europe, European identity, globalisation, governance



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What has the European Union, particularly its political identity, to do with globalisation? Two keywords – governance and new regionalism – may help explaining this link from the venture point of the political philosophy of international and global relations.

Globalisation is a fashionable if inevitable word and so is *governance*. In the past decade one of the most successful books in International Relations theory carried the puzzling title *Governance without Government* (Rosenau-Czempiel, 1992). In its original meaning within the context of system theory governance meant a kind of cybernetic self-control and self-regulation of the international system in the globalised world (Young, 1999). That the present world is governed in an impersonal way without visible and formal institutions of man-made government is a fascinating hypothesis, but recent developments show that this hypothesis does not have the strength of an overall explanation; it also retains something of a free-market fundamentalism, as if the entire world of social and political relations could be conceived of in terms of market-like self-regu-

lation. Some politics is still required, and there is some room for inventing and experimenting with new forms of government.

Now, among the proposals as how to govern globalisation, we find at the one end of the spectrum the so-called hyperglobalisation, i.e. American imperial unilateralism in the supposedly surviving world of Westphalian nation-states. On the opposite end the supporters of cosmopolitanism such as Falk and Held (see Archibugi *et al.*, 1998) suggest the notion that democratic world-government alone can master globalisation. My contention is that *tertium datur*: that is a multilateral international order based on the build-up of sub-continental associations of states, as envisaged in the theory of *new regionalism* (Telò, 2001). Associations of this kind already exist, even if they are very different in nature and the degree of development among themselves. The European Union is the most mature among them, but it is just an example, not a normative model for the others (just to mention the most relevant ones: Mercosur in South America, Nafta in North America, Asean in South East Asia). Uncertainty still exists as to whether these blocs are going to be just competing Super-Leviathans, interacting with each other along the classical patterns of the balance of power, or rather can establish more civilised relationships, based on collective security as well as peaceful and legal cooperation. It is only clear that, if any, the EU comes closer to this second type of regionalism, and this makes it worth to be dealt with while discussing how to govern globalisation. As the debate on the European identity is biased by a considerable degree of conceptual confusion about identity in general and political identity in particular, more reasoning is needed to explain why we focus on the European political identity. It is therefore useful to clarify first the meaning of “political identity” on which the following reflections are based (see Cerutti, 1996).

Political identity is a set of values and principles (which may or may not include comprehensive views of the world/*Weltbilder*, but in any case implies a shared understanding of history, particularly of a history as contentious as the European), through which we recognise ourselves as a “we”. In other words we find in the sharing of these values, principles and interpretations enough sense and sufficient reasons for keeping together and designing together the future life of the polity (recognition/*Anerkennung* is the key concept in this definition, it highlights the reflexive character of political identity as a process open to change and redefinition, the opposite of a monolith). This identity does not coincide with cultural identity (culturalist fallacy), nor does it simply result from what we have been in the past (historicist fallacy). Particularly in the case of new democratic polities, it always implies choosing elements from past history and giving them a new order and significance (the normative or “constitutional” moment, which is essential in the present stage of the European process). The symbolic character of any (including political) identity does not imply that it must be based on a “foundational myth”, although some identities are and even more identities among the national ones used to be, not only outside the European continent.

Four main question can be raised about the European identity:

- Is the political identity of Europeans necessary?
- Is the political identity of Europeans possible?

- Are Europeans going to have an identity or several identities? Or: what is the structure of their identity likely to be?
- What is the normative content of such an identity, what is the project contained in it?

1. Is the political identity of Europeans necessary?

Identity must be regarded as an indispensable element of the European construction only if we look at it as a truly political process, or in other words if we believe that Europe is going to become a full-fledged polity (which is not necessarily the same as to be a state). This is not to argue normatively that the EU has to become a full political entity; what is intended is just this essential, if conditional, link: if European citizens wish to have a political Union, they cannot reach this goal without developing a political identity¹.

There are structural reasons for this assertion: political identity is a condition of *legitimacy*, without legitimacy there is no life for political institutions, because they cannot reckon on the citizens' allegiance and participation. Political are those institutions that discuss choices and make decisions on ultimate and encompassing issues such as peace and war, constitutional rules, distributive justice. In the framework of European multilevel governance, the political decision-making power is no longer a mere intergovernmental issue that relies on the legitimacy of national governments. It is increasingly leaving the national capitals and moving to "Brussels", even if length and ambiguity of the process have to be taken seriously ("Brussels" does not mean exclusively the European Commission or Parliament, but the recently reinforced weight of the Council as well – a Council indeed which is not necessarily a mere clearing room among national self-interests, as it acts under the common constraint of reinforcing European institutions in order to make Europe more competitive economically and more influential as a regulatory power)².

In other words: if the EU becomes a major decision-maker in its own capacity, it can claim the citizens' allegiance and exert its authority only if they feel they have enough things in common as to abide by the rules set by common institutions. Allegiance and participation must appear to them meaningful with regard to their common symbolic

¹ It is wise to underline the conditional nature of these reflections on the future of Europe. At this moment (summer 2003) it does not seem that the power elites in the member states of the European Union are eager to complete the development towards a more political Union which took place between the Maastricht Treaty of 1991 and the Laeken Declaration of 2001. The disunity regarding the war in Iraq as well as the permanence of veto power in foreign, defence and financial policy proposed in the draft EU-Constitution seem to postpone the political completion of the Union to the next generation at best. The Eastern enlargement could have a retarding or hindering effect on this completion process, whose happy end is by no means guaranteed. The Constitution in itself is a step of ambivalent meaning, as far as political unity and identity are concerned.

² We have to mention that this link of political community and legitimacy rooted in identity is significant only if we do not share the system theory of society and its idea that in high-rationalised societies political institutions produce their own legitimacy (Luhmann's *autopoiesis*).

and normative sphere. In this sense they must feel like one single actor (or, philosophically, one subject). Otherwise there would be little sense (and no stability of will) for the Portuguese to pay taxes raised by “Brussels”, or for the French to endorse a ruling of the European Court of Justice, or for Belgians, Italians and Polish to risk their lives in a peace-enforcing operation ordered by a joint EU-military command (these are just fictional examples, since so far “Brussels” has not received the authority to raise taxes or to order military actions).

While there is no room here for unfolding the whole theory of legitimacy and showing the links between identity and its other elements, it is worth stressing that the issue we have so far dealt with is political legitimacy in general, not democratic deficit. Legitimacy is a ground element of political order whatsoever, and is not at all limited to democracies.

Finally, it is almost superfluous to remember that identity is not just a pre-condition for political communities to be perceived as legitimate, but a consequence of institutionalised communal life as well. Only when the common values and images have settled in formal institutions and these have started to impact on everybody’s life, in a way which is effective and perceivable to everybody, the consciousness of being one group can fully take shape and be reproduced over the years and generations. Not unlike the evolution of national identity, for a new group identity to take roots in the citizens’ mind it first takes the decision of a political and cultural élite to establish new supranational institutions and to make them work. We can perhaps say that new institutions are always necessarily “premature” with regard to the effective stage of identity-building. For example, we should carefully watch the identity-building effects of the common currency, which can in the future be expected considering the symbolic impact of money on our life-world.

2. *Is the political identity of the Europeans possible?*

The argument that *national identity* is the ultimate shape of political identity because of its unique roots in nature and history has lost all intellectual credibility as of late since authors such as Benedict Anderson, Ernst Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm and even Anthony Smith have worked out the “imagined” and “constructed” character of nations – an illumination which already emerged in Ernest Renan’s sentence “la nation est un plébiscite de tous les jours” (Renan, 1882). The core of all arguments against a meta-national or a supranational identity becoming possible is the hidden and uncritical assumption that conceives of it exactly in the same terms as of national identity. What must be stressed is, first of all, that meta-national identity³, including the European one, is not going to cancel and bury national identities in the same way as the national identities used to do to local and regional ones in 19th century Europe. At this stage of our reasoning, if we want to find out about the possibility of an European identity to exist

³ Meta-national is used instead of the more usual supranational because the EU, an unprecedented mix of regional, national and communitarian institutions, is not likely to develop the full supranational character of a classical federation, and perhaps should refrain from doing so, because it would otherwise give up its unprecedented elements of post-modern and post-etatist polity.

(about its *Bedingungen der Möglichkeit*, as Kant would say), we must refine our notion of it – which we are going to do in the next section.

There is indeed another way to raise the possibility question, this time in a more substantive version. Granted that a meta-national identity is possible in Europe, what will its real dimension be? The weakening or vanishing of national identities could end up in something which would undermine the chance for the Union's citizens to develop a corresponding identity. On the one hand, they could see the EU as a mere functional entity, good at regulating markets, money and borders, but indistinguishable from the West, primarily the US, as far as values, principles and destiny are concerned – well beyond the political and cultural links now existing in the North-Atlantic community. On the other hand, they could react to the challenges and burdens of globalisation along the lines of what Michael Walzer (1994) has called “new tribalism”, i.e. taking refuge in a closed and defiant picture of the local or ethnic community – a self-defensive reaction which is one of the elements behind regional movements in today's Europe (e.g. Vlaams Blok, Lega Nord). These movements, if they are not altogether anti-European and ethno-fascist like the Lega Nord, view the Union as a kind of Fortress Europe, born out of regional self-interests and shielding these against globalisation and immigration from the South.

Theoretical investigations cannot be expected to release prophecies about the kind of identity that may prevail. We can only say that the outcome is not pre-determined by “objective” (cultural or economic) factors, but will rather depend upon the ability of European citizens and statesmen to govern the Union as an autonomous and self-confident actor in the worldwide competition and cooperation. Tribalism is more likely to come up where untamed globalisation, lack of vision and poor governance prevail. Relevant to this outcome will therefore be not only the structure, but also the content of identity⁴.

3. *Are Europeans going to have an identity or several identities? Or what is the structure of their identity likely to be?*

The word identity is still suspicious to many, particularly to Foucaultian post-modernists or to orthodox readers of Adorno's *Negative Dialektik*. Prophets of difference, diversity, multiplicity, cannot conceive of identity other than in terms of imposed unity, compulsory homogeneity and totalitarian hierarchy. This amounts to all too easily surrendering an indispensable and neutral category like identity to ideological traditions such as the *union sacrée*, or even *Ein Reich, ein Volk, ein Fuehrer*, or similar ethnocentric types of “authoritarian personality” studied by Adorno *et alii*. There is more dialectics between identity and difference than these prophets may ever presume. Difference is difference only in the relationship of different individuals or groups which share a common ground. This should be taken into consideration also by those who make use of the concept of identity, but only as a multiple, steadily renegotiated identity, and forget

⁴ On European identity and the related theoretical problems see my contributions in Cerutti/ Rudolph (2001).

to say how the various identities keep together, i.e. where their moment of unity and permanence is to be found. But let us now focus on the specific features of political identity, and the European identity in particular.

Because of the *diversity* which is Europe's indestructible richness, because of the gradual, piecemeal method of a process which is a process of integration rather than unification, because of the size of the emerging polity, the institutional structure of the Union is likely to be far from the centralised model of the modern state, even in the federal version. And such will be the identity of its citizens. Decision-making will remain located at several levels (local, regional, national, European), interconnected by bargaining and competition rather than by a vertical chain of command. Once this structure has become clear to more and more citizens, coalitions of interests as well as old and new cultural affinities will link citizens and groups across national borders – to an extent, e.g. in academic cooperation, they already do so.

All this is still not enough to give Europeans a political identity. This can succeed only when people see that the Union is able to make and enforce *decisions* in a few essential fields, in which nation-states have lost much of their independent power: how to ensure peace, where and why to use military force, how to ensure an elementary degree of economic prosperity and social stability and solidarity, a peculiar European value. Legitimacy is granted to institutions not just because they embody our values, they must also prove their effectiveness in implementing those values (by the way, this is why a purely normative theory of legitimacy can hardly be regarded as *political* theory). A new supranational identity can gather momentum only if people feel that some decisions affecting their lives are now made in "Brussels", and that they are made by leaders who represent the citizens in a democratic, accountable way. Neither further elaborations on Europe as a "community of destiny" (Edgar Morin), nor on its Christian or Carolingian heritage, nor the best ever models of European constitution, not even a (desirable) huge increase in Erasmus exchanges or industrial joint ventures will have on the citizens a comparable identity-building effect. The rhetoric of the hoped-for European civil society, which is obviously a central factor of integration and democratic control, should not conceal the fact that nothing is as effective in fostering political identity as political processes, not even an expanding European civil society. To be subject to the same rules, to be promoters (as electors) and addressees (as citizens of a no-longer voluntaristic community) of the same policies: this is the circumstance which will make us (perhaps even the British) feel like a "we" (as far as in present-day democracies, with all their "unkept promises" analysed by Bobbio, citizens can still feel like a self-governed "we" – but this cannot be discussed here).

Other than social or cultural identity, political identity has and must have a centred structure, must be an identity and cannot be a complex of identities. If we act as a whole and make decisions on fundamental, even vital, issues, we cannot do that without thinking that it makes sense to make those decisions together and for the same reasons; reasons which in a democracy are not "given" or imposed, but rather defined in the public dialogue. Politics is also bargaining, but it is not just bargaining; nor would we be able to share and to legitimate those decisions if we had to think that they are the neutralised outcome of technical choice or strategic calculation among bearers of self-interests.

This general thesis has three corollaries in Europe.

It is important to keep political identity, which is just one of the several types of identity among which the individuals define and redefine their own personal identity, distinct from *social and cultural identities*, which have an increasingly less centred structure and can thus counterbalance political identity and nourish its process of change/adaptation. It is likewise important to understand that if we feel like Europeans with regard to certain general issues, we can and actually do still feel like Italians and Sicilians, or Germans and Bavarians, when it comes to political issues which remain in the power range of national and regional governments. This is a well-known fact in federal states, and there is no good reason why it should not be so in the EU, which in the foreseeable future will not become the United States of Europe⁵.

It is important to note that the reasons so far advanced for developing a European political identity do not include *division* from or opposition to other states or civilisations. Self-identification obviously means the perception of being different from others. But division or separation are not the first and sufficient basis on which to define and build up the new identity. Metaphorically, political identity as such is not just the raising of a boundary wall, although this is an indispensable moment and although there are actually identities (e.g. ethnic) which are centred on this wall. Identity-building in the political group is first of all the work of looking at ourselves in the mirror and finding enough common ideas and emotions as to justify communal life in the *polis*⁶.

The narrow definition of political identity as something different from social and cultural identity makes the scepticism about the “rootlessness” of a European identity less credible. Politics is no longer the paramount human activity it used to be in republican or nationalist paradigms, and it does not pretend to impose its mark on other spheres. Besides, it has become more “abstract” in at least two senses. First, the governance of complexity (the more in a polity of 370 and soon 450 millions) requires a high degree of flexibility and accommodation and does not allow for simplified principles that may be described and advertised in terms of substantive goals. Secondly, the policy of social, racial, gender and other fairness, which is the basic principle in advanced democracies, lets us feel that we agree on general and procedural norms (the “rights”) rather than substantive policies, which are to be determined case by case in the ups and downs of the political game. It is the essential, constitutional agreement that is at the core of our “post-conventional” identity. It must also be said that the abstractness (*absit iniuria verbo*) of meta-national and post-conventional identity does not rule out symbols – like all communication, political communication works with symbols. It simply requires more abstract, less traditional types of symbols (ideas rather than flags): the European banner or even Beethoven’s and Schiller’s *Hymne an die Freude*, Europe’s not yet official anthem, will never raise the same wave of emotions like *Tricolore* and *Marseillaise*,

⁵ The European Union is at best defined by the interplay of political identity and cultural diversity. This is why the Preamble to the European Constitution, in which in a fairly illiberal way a political body strives to assemble pieces of our cultural diversity into one identity, is such a needless and ill-conceived enterprise.

⁶ Against Huntington’s view of cultural identities as defined primarily by opposition and clash see Cerutti 2001.

and the search for Europe's symbols that may have the same character like the national ones is at the same time misguided and pathetic.

A more serious consideration deserves the argument that any post-national polity must lack the communality of language and habits that are common to nations and has insofar no concrete roots in the communicative experience of everyday life. This is true, although it must be remembered that a full communality is not given in all of the "historic" nations. "Abstract" though it may be, the European identity will have to come to terms with this circumstance, and the way has still to be invented. This problem overlaps with the problem of what public sphere and public opinion may mean in the EU, if this is to mean something more than the sum of national public spheres. But this is a problem, not an unsurpassable obstacle.

4. What is the normative content of the European political identity?

The abstractness of our political identity means an abstract content, not a lack of any content. Now, human rights (including social rights), instead of power politics, and cooperation/integration, instead of contending sovereignties, have since 1945 been the basis on which Europeans have succeeded in redirecting their history towards the new common goals of peace and prosperity. This still constitutes the "project Europe": it may have lost some utopian splendor of the origins, but the utopia of the Forties and Fifties has now become every-day reality. In so far, European unity has already roots in a five-decade history.

On the other hand, Europe is also bound to become a regional Great Power in economic and perhaps even political terms. We do not yet know what exactly its place will be in the multipolar order of regional powers, but this place is now certain. The EU will have at the same time the chance to be a peaceful and democratic "beacon" which will be cheered around the globe much more than the US, and a powerful competitor in the planetary globalisation game.

How can the universalistic claims of the project be reconciled with the (necessarily) particularistic features of a geopolitical entity? Can they be reconciled? How will we feel (we, the citizens at the top of the beacon) whenever a ship with illegal immigrants is stopped at the Italian or Spanish shores, or – say – a decision made by the ECB or the Commission will have negative effects on the developing countries' economies?

This is not a contradiction that can be solved once for all. Rather it is a contradiction which we are bound to live with, and have to learn to live with. The self-definition of the Europeans must take place in the field defined by the tension between those two poles. The democratic tradition in the United States has always had this problem, and we should try to come to grips with it in a less hypocritical way than on the other side of the Atlantic, but this should not be impossible. For example, a way to reconcile universalistic claims and particularistic interests is to improve international cooperation and the institutionalisation of international relations – something from which the US is hindered by that peculiar version of political realism (the "national interest") that ends up in isolationism and/or imperial postures. There is no element in today's political conscience of Europeans that may force us to follow the same pattern.

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